

Embracing the Darkness:

Tasmania's Winter Festivals as Parody and Homage in Amazon's *Deadloch*

Rebekah Brammer
Tasmania, Australia

Keywords
Winter Festivals
Tasmania
Gothic
Crime
Comedy
Gastro-Tourism

Abstract

Australia's southern-most state, Tasmania, is a popular tourist destination, with over 1.3 million visitors per year (Tourism Tas 2024). The island state features areas of pristine wilderness, looming mountains, and spectacular coastlines. It is also foodie heaven, with its local produce and wine as much a drawcard as its scenery. Despite the cold weather, Tasmanian tourism campaigns invite visitors to immerse themselves in 'The Off Season', when things get 'wilder, weirder and more wonderful' (Discover Tas 2025) by partaking in sophisticated and hedonistic events fuelled by sumptuous food and drink. Of the several winter festivals in Tasmania, the most famous, and somewhat notorious, one is Dark Mofo. The hallmarks of the festival are its enticing Winter Feast, provocative and often controversial performance art, and the Nude Solstice Swim.

While providing a boost to tourism in the less-hospitable winter months, these festivals also feature bonfires, burning effigies, and paganistic outdoor dance parties, demonstrating Tasmania's willingness to embrace its dark, gothic nature. How does this tourism milieu seep into popular culture? Season 1 of Amazon's 2023 eight-part comedy-crime series *Deadloch* is set in a fictitious Tasmanian town and features a local crime spree colliding with its annual 'Winter Festival' [sic]. This festive backdrop adds to the who-dunnit drama, with a town full of tourists and a nervous mayor who sees that the festival revenue is dropping as the body count rises. The show's fictional festival includes events such as an all-women choir performing rock classics, an artistic mass nude photoshoot, and a signature culinary experience, 'Beast on a Cross': a nose-to-tail outdoor dining extravaganza. This interdisciplinary paper combines food and tourism studies with screen scholarship to demonstrate how *Deadloch* constructs its narrative to lovingly parody and pay homage to Tasmania's winter festivals and gastro-tourism.

Introduction: Tasmania's food, festivals, and gothic tourism

Home to approximately 570,000 people,¹ Tasmania is renowned for its 'large rural areas, dense forests, highlands, rivers, lakes, white sandy beaches, rugged coastline, cool and sometimes harsh climate' (Farrelly and Makkar 2023: 1539). Although predictably driven by nature and wilderness experiences, tourism also encompasses 'foodie' drawcards such as 'paddock-to-plate' culinary offerings and premium drinks, along with the opportunity to attend world-class festivals (Ooi and Hardy 2020: 2). A peak growth period occurred in 2008–2018, with visitor numbers growing from just under 900,000 to 1.3 million (Ooi and Hardy 2020: 1). By 2024, excluding COVID, annual visitation held steady at the latter number, attesting to the fact that tourism is a vital state industry, which generates nearly \$AU3.5 billion for the economy (Tourism Tas 2024). Tourism Tasmania campaigns such as 'The Off Season' highlight the island's unique winter charm: 'Winter in Tasmania isn't just a season—it's an experience [...] when things get wilder, weirder and more wonderful', encouraging exploration of events like the Stanley and Tarkine Forage Festival and the Bay of Fires Winter Arts Festival (Discover Tas 2025). While these events and campaigns have helped solidify Tasmania's status as a year-round destination, this was not always the case. A defining factor in this change was the opening of the Museum of Old and New Art ('MONA') near the state's capital Hobart in 2011, and its highly successful winter festival, Dark Mofo, which first began two years later.

The so-called 'MONA effect' cannot be underestimated. The phenomenon takes its name from the 'Bilbao Effect', which reflected the incredible success of Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (Franklin 2019: 107). The privately-owned MONA 'changed the way in which Tasmania is perceived, the tourists who visit here, the arts and cultural industries in Tasmania and even the way in which the state is marketed' (Ooi and Hardy 2020: 3). With midwinter constituting a flat period for visitation of MONA and Tasmanian tourism generally, there were some unsuccessful attempts to launch winter festivals prior to the first Dark Mofo in 2013, with a notable exception being the still-thriving Festival of Voices (Franklin 2019: 109). With its hedonistic and paganistic overtones, Dark Mofo reignited midwinter traditions by using the winter solstice to 'usher in transformative/confronting experiences' (Franklin 2019: 108). The festival transforms Hobart by imbuing it with MONA's 'mix of carnivalesque and Dionysian metaphors [...] in a week of programmatic mischief and misrule at midwinter' (Franklin 2019: 106). The success of the festival proved to be a major boost for tourism numbers during the off-peak season (Ooi 2020: 15–16), and the aforementioned 'Off-Season' campaign is now a perennial one.

A vital component of these winter festival offerings, and of Tasmanian tourism in general, is its reputation for exceptional quality in artisanal food and drink (Farrelly and Makkar 2023: 1539). Alongside its famed seafood and quality meats, alcoholic beverages including beers, ciders, wine, whisky, and gin have helped forge the state's reputation as a premium foodie destination (Ooi 2020: 20). Food and drink are a lynchpin of its

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Region summary: Tasmania (2023)* <<https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region.html?lyr=ste&rgn=6>>.

tourism campaigns,² and the state hosts a staggering number of culinary events each year, from larger events in its cities, such as Launceston's Festivale, to rural seasonal events such as Deloraine's Hop to Harvest Festival. Farrelly and Makkar have also identified that 'foodie tourists' are highly motivated to 'experience local foods and heritage cuisines as a means to understand the people and culture of a place' (2023: 1537). In interviews with Tasmanian producers, they found that their incorporation of the French notion of *terroir*, or 'taste of place', was influential 'in enticing tourists to make a range of attributions between place, product uniqueness, and product quality' (Farrelly and Makkar 2023: 1546). Although already a major drawcard in its own right, MONA also embraces 'food-centric tourism' by centralising culinary experiences in both the museum itself and its festivals (Tarulevicz 2021: 122). The value of Tasmania's artisanal food and drink industry is clearly a vital component of its overall tourism industry, which is strongly connected to its festival culture. Underscoring the synergy between tourism, festivals, and food, Franklin (2019: 114) observes that '[Dark Mofo's] emphasis on feasting and its successful promotion of locally produced foods and drinks has ensured its persistence'. As Bell and Valentine (1997: 161) note, the commodification of a region as a 'local space' enhances its uniqueness in opposition to global consumerism. Tasmania's marketing as a destination with distinct regional 'flavour' entices visitors to enjoy unique places, experiences, and tastes.

The allure of MONA and Tasmania's winter festivals is heightened by their connection with the Tasmanian Gothic. Clarke and Brozek see the 'MONA effect' as being reflective of a broader orientation towards a 'dark tourist aesthetic' in contemporary Tasmania, drawing on the gothic traditions rooted in the state's violent colonial history, which are then curated through tourism experiences at convict sites and major cultural events like Dark Mofo (2021: 512). Musing on the then-new festival, the University of Tasmania's Ralph Crane suggested that its success stemmed from the fact that it 'embraces the Tasmanian Gothic that permeates the creative industries [and] adopts this aesthetic of darkness' (Crane 2015). Likewise, researcher Briony Kidd (2016) notes that festivals such as Dark Mofo, Queenstown's Unconformity arts festival, and her own feminist horror film festival, Stranger with My Face, purposefully engage with the darkness of the Tasmanian Gothic tradition. As McEvoy (2016) points out, in cultural industries, gothic is a useful 'cultural tool, providing [...] imagery and tropes [as] a kind of common currency'. Alongside its fire-lit nighttime events, the signature black and red design of Dark Mofo's programme and event signage, including neon-red crosses and signs, provocatively evoke a gothic mood.

² <https://www.discovertasmania.com.au/things-to-do/food-and-drink/>



Dark Mofo, 2018 (photo by Kris McCracken, Creative Commons License)

Welcome to Deadloch: Tassie Goth-Noir

With this contextual background on Tasmania's tourism, festival, and culinary culture in mind, we can now turn to Amazon Prime's comedy-crime television series *Deadloch*, which is both set and produced in the island state. Premiering in June 2023, *Deadloch* quickly became a critical and popular hit, enjoying several weeks as Amazon's number one series in both Australia and New Zealand, and reaching the top 10 in North America, the UK, and parts of Europe (Turnbull and McCutcheon 2024: 19). Billed as 'a feminist noir comedy set against a bucolic backdrop with a rising body count',³ the series expertly parodies and inverts Nordic Noir and other crime tropes, as well as elements of the Tasmanian Gothic (Brammer 2025). In the (fictional) rural Tasmanian town of Deadloch, ambitious Mayor Aleyna (Susie Youssef) has 'transformed the town from a rural backwater to a bustling modern tourist town, with all the wellness, paddock-to-plate and pink dollar trimmings'.⁴ However, with the first of many dead bodies appearing on the eve of the 'Winter Festival' [sic], she struggles to hold the town (and her sanity) together. Calm and meticulous local detective Dulcie (Kate Box) is reluctantly teamed up with rambunctious mainland sleuth Eddie (Madeleine Sami) to solve the crime amid a town full of Festival tourists and colourful locals. At the narrative level, the Festival is cleverly employed to frame the murders, create red herrings and alibis, and hinder the investigation. It also parodies foodie culture and Tasmanian festivals, particularly the Dark Mofo winter festival and its gothic image.

Before diving into a textual analysis of *Deadloch's* Winter Festival, it is important to outline some theoretical frameworks that underpin its comparison with the real Tasmanian context. In her work, Gothic scholar Catherine Spooner draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque,

³ Screen Australia Screen Guide. <<https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/the-screen-guide/t/deadloch-series-1-2023/39782/>>

⁴ *Deadloch press kit* <<https://guessworktv.com.au/show/deadloch/>>.

connecting disruptive laughter, the reversal of conventional hierarchies, and grotesque bodies to contemporary texts, including comedy (2007: 63-68). This is directly applicable to *Deadloch*'s use of the festival as a backdrop to the inherent grotesqueness of a murder investigation and the integration of various 'bodies' in the narrative, as well as the previously noted carnivalesque nature of real festivals such as Dark Mofo. In the introduction to her book on the Gothic representation of food and horror, Lorna Piatti-Farnell notes that, 'from celebrity cooking shows [...] to cinematic narratives that focus on gastronomic journeys of self-discovery, food has long ceased to occupy its role as 'just nourishment', and has become an inescapable part of representation within popular culture' (2017: 3). Her insights on 'the place occupied by food as a Gothicised entity' (2017: 11) contribute to the analytical framework by illustrating how the depiction of festive gastronomy in *Deadloch* intersects with the show's serial-killer storyline and its parody of Tasmania's Gothicised festival experiences. Anthropologist Victor Turner's concept of 'communitas', also employed in the research of his wife Edith, relates to the collective joy, oneness, or togetherness experienced at an event, which both authors have related to festivals (Turner 2012; Turner 1978). This concept will be explored through a comparison between collective arts experiences at Tasmanian festivals and the fictional events depicted in *Deadloch*.



Deadloch's mayor with the Festival event board (Everett Collection Inc / Alamy Stock Photo, used under license)

Culinary parody in Deadloch: beasts and food stars

Deadloch's fictional 'Feastival' includes two major food events: the official menu launch event and the feast itself, 'Beast on a Cross'. The chef, Skye O'Dwyer (Holly Austin), plays an important part in both events. After growing up in Deadloch, she then moved away to work in prestigious restaurants both abroad and in Sydney, before returning to open her own gastro-pub, the Bush Wolf (a nickname for the thylacine, or Tasmanian Tiger). Feisty and forthright, she is something of a local star in the town and, as such, takes on the role of culinary head of the festival. During her speech at the

launch event, she explains that she believes both the Festival and her eatery are breathing new life into the town. This also reflects the gentrification of Deadloch, especially as an enclave for 'tree-changers' from the mainland seeking a new life in the rural town. Skye's affinity with the town allows her to market her business to both visitors and locals as being 'personal' and therefore suggestive of a more authentic culinary experience. In real-life gastro-tourism, the promotion of local chefs, restaurants, and the produce they use is also an important aspect of building consumer perception of the connection between food and place (Farrelly and Makkar 2023: 1537). Skye's mother, Victoria (Kris McQuade), is also a cook, but unlike her daughter's highbrow culinary business, she runs the local bakery, a staple on the main street of any Australian town. Minutes before the Bush Wolf launch event begins, she says 'I need to make sandwiches for everyone, Skye, the food in there's tiny'. Predictably, her daughter does not take this well, snapping, 'They're hors d'oeuvres, they're supposed to be fucking small!'. Popular culture, including food and cooking shows, has elevated fine-dining cuisine to the point where the foodstuff has become the star (Bell and Valentine 1997: 5-6). Attendees of food festival events such as the Bush Wolf's launch bring with them all the expectations fed to them by popular culture, so Victoria's urge to make more 'homely' food to satiate the guests speaks to the parody of high and low culture presented throughout the series.

Another such cultural clash involves Detective Eddie. At the Bush Wolf event, she lives up to her disorderly nature, embodying the female grotesque by behaving in highly inappropriate ways (Brammer 2025). First, she arrives entirely underdressed (and incongruously for the chilly Tasmanian weather) in shorts, sandals, and a Hawaiian shirt. At the bar, where fine wines and craft beers are on offer, she orders a beer, and is informed by the bar attendant that it is called 'doppelbock'. After taking a swig, she grabs a half-full glass of wine from a nearby diner and spits the beer into it in disgust, thus breaking culturally-accepted 'rules that construct and inform the culinary event' (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 222). Eddie's crassly comic moment is mirrored by another incident involving a drink. Local coroner James (Nick Simpson-Deeks) takes a sip of his wine, declares that it is not what he had expected, and instructs his fiancé and Deadloch police office Abby (Nina Oyama), to return it to the bar. While the event may be coded as highbrow, such behaviour is unnecessarily snobby; he also presents Abby's theories on the murders as his own, cementing his character as a misogynistic boor. In a third example of inappropriate food behaviour, when offering a platter of hors d'oeuvres to guests, the server casually picks one up with his fingers and pops it into his mouth. Although festival-goers may frequently encounter finger-food, the server's act represents another contravention of culinary etiquette employed for comic effect.

Dark Mofo's perennial Winter Feast is described as an 'enormous gothic feast in a candlelit dining hall' that showcases the region's culinary delights (Harmon 2016). In carnivalesque/Dionysian fashion, it invites visitors to 'Face the fire and feast en masse. Glut yourself on decadent offerings'.⁵ With over 70 artisanal food and drink vendors to choose from, the festival

⁵ <https://darkmofo.net.au/winter-feast>



also invites guest chefs from Australia and abroad to create unique dishes for the Winter Feast (Rocca 2024). The pinnacle of the Deadloch Winter Feastival, Beast on a Cross, may be on a much more intimate scale, but it undoubtedly pays homage to the Winter Feast. The Feastival dining table is outdoors, embracing the Tasmanian winter festival experience of enjoying longer cool nights by firelight. Guests are seated at a cross-shaped table adorned with candles, further illuminated by a large pink cross, in a nod to Dark Mofo's neon-red crosses that adorn multiple events, including its Winter Feast. Warming the Deadloch diners is the 'beast' itself: an entire cow carcass suspended vertically above a pit of flame, being basted with what look like brooms. Roasting animals over open flames are also a feature of the Winter Feast. Chef Jake Kellie, who has worked at celebrity-chef Heston Blumenthal's Fat Duck in the UK, tempted diners with a 'wall of meat and flame' in 2015.⁶ Chefs from MONA's Faro restaurant recreated their Heavy Metal Kitchen at 2024's Winter Feast, featuring wild-caught venison and wallaby suspended on open fire grills (Rocca 2024). Deadloch's 'beast', presided over by the town's star chef Skye, pays homage to decadent, fire-fuelled carnivorous winter feasting.

In anticipation of the Beast on a Cross dinner, an enthusiastic Deadloch festival-goer intones, 'It's 12 courses, nose-to-tail. There's wafers made of tripe'. As the dinner commences, waitstaff in masks casually offer hors d'oeuvres, 'Testicle?'. The consumption of these parts of the animal parodies the journey of offal from 'lowbrow' to 'highbrow' cuisine. Tasmanian chef and food producer Matthew Evans (2017) reminds us that offal was once predominantly consumed by the working class as it was all they could afford, with its return to our plates being the result of the growing 'nose to tail' trend in the restaurant world. The 'rules' of what we can consume are also codified 'by cultural context and its social manifestations' (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 15). In the context of *Deadloch*'s Beast on a Cross, the eating of these 'delicacies' is coded as a highbrow culinary experience exclusively for the Feastival diners, presumably at a premium cost. Dark comic tension emerges through the juxtaposition of this excessively consumptive meal with a serial killer on the loose. Chef Skye is applauded as she sharpens her knife ready to carve the beast, but who is carving up the victims in Deadloch? Mirroring the convergence of horror experiences with food consumption in twenty-first-century popular culture, the Deadloch murderer's horrific removal of each victim's tongue—an organ used to both talk and taste, and one considered 'offal' in butchery—shows how 'notions of disgust, fear [...] and punishment are clearly merged with the embodied spheres of consumption' (Piatti-Farnell 2017: 4).

Deadloch also has another 'food star' in self-styled matriarch, Margaret Carruthers (Pamela Rabe), who hosts the Beast on a Cross dinner at her estate. Her culinary persona can be read as a parody of famous Australian 'home cooks' such as Donna Hay or Maggie Beer. Deliberately *not* dubbing themselves chefs is an important part of their broad appeal, and they have each built lucrative businesses. As an example, Beer is a beloved public figure both on television and as a popular guest at food festivals,⁷

⁶ <https://eatsydney.info/2015/06/22/dark-mofo-2015/>

⁷ <https://tastingaustralia.com.au/festival-stars/maggie-beer>

and her curated public image as a 'food personality' and domestic cook 'who revels in her amateurism' grounds her with authenticity (Gunders 2008). Like her real-life counterparts, who have released multiple cook-books, Carruthers is launching her expensive book as part of the Feastival calendar. Her festival patronage and high profile in Deadloch mask sinister actions that tie into the series' central murder mystery, positioning her parody closer to the USA's Martha Stewart and her infamous fall from grace. Just as Stewart faced a negative response to her crimes due to the 'disparity between her expressed domesticity and her very obvious financial success' (Gunders 2008), it seems audacious that Carruthers is promoting an \$AU90 recipe book despite her wealth and power in the town. Even when detective Dulcie visits her regarding the murder investigation, Margaret is self-promoting her humblebrag domestic goddess persona, with their interview taking place in the kitchen, where she thrusts festival-bound desserts at the detective to reluctantly taste-test.

Feastival artistic parodies: 'I hated it, it was amazing!'

In addition to these key festive food events, it is worth exploring some of the other Feastival events in *Deadloch*, where we also find clever parodies of arts festival experiences that either embody or subvert the Turners' notion of 'communitas'. Viewers are oriented to the Feastival's events through the use of a public blackboard, which also operates as a comic device, subtly parodying the strange and often controversial events that take place at Tasmania's winter festivals. If we compare the names of events on the Feastival board—such as Hellenic Screaming Ceremony, Norwegian Funeral Pyre, and Carrot Wank—with a selection of those from the 2025 Dark Mofo programme, including Chocolate Goblin, Coffin Rides, and Ogoh-Ogoh: The Purging,⁸ we can see that they are equally provocative, coming across as weird or scary and teasing immersive and potentially controversial experiences. Eagle-eyed viewers will also spot in-jokes on the Feastival board, such as 'Amanda Palmer every night'—the American singer has attended a number of real festivals and been described as the 'patron saint of all things Mofo'.⁹

While Dark Mofo's artistic experiences make it 'Australia's most consistently challenging and rewarding cultural event' (Teague 2023), part of *Deadloch*'s parody of such events lies in their incongruity with its rural-town atmosphere. While its newer residents and visiting tourists may be titillated by what is advertised on the Feastival blackboard, some of the town's longer-term residents are bemused and even malevolent towards these wild and weird events. In line with the show's feminist slant, these are usually angry men. As an example, a local man angrily intones, 'our mayolette wants us to go see a show that teaches people how to wank off a carrot!'. Margaret Carruthers also recounts that in a previous year, men dumped roadkill in front of the town hall in protest, commenting, 'the patrons just thought the whole thing was art. Even the smell'. Although viewers do not get to witness most of what appears on the board, we do see an event attended by detective Dulcie's wife Cath (Alicia Gardiner), in which participants stand

⁸ <https://darkmofo.net.au/program>

⁹ <https://theatrenorth.com.au/mofo2020amandapalmer>

in a field and watch the artist, an elderly woman dressed in white, stare silently back at them. Asked by another spectator when it ends, Cath answers, 'it's endurance art... nobody knows!' She later says to Dulcie, 'I hated it, it was amazing!'

In real-life examples of endurance art, Mike Parr's 'Entry By Mirror Only' at Dark Mofo 2016 was held at a former asylum, and featured Parr drawing in his pyjamas for 72 hours. Attendees at this event were observed 'leaving the site in tears' and 'overwhelmed by the profundity of simply experiencing the site, much less bearing witness to his performance' (Bastow 2016). Therefore, aside from the art experience itself, the asylum is also an inherently Gothicised site, and the attraction of visiting a historical building of this type of falls within both McEvoy's definition of Gothic Tourism (2016: 6) and Tasmania's 'dark tourist aesthetic' (Clarke and Brozek 2021: 512). The following year, Dark Mofo hosted a controversial performance art event by Hermann Nitsch called '150.Action', which involved volunteer 'performers' tearing apart a bull carcass in a three-hour bloodbath of 'gore, nudity and intense physical ritual' (Teague 2023). Making a noteworthy parallel with the culinary side of Dark Mofo, Teague noted, 'that year it was the animal rights protesters who made the festival's now customary headlines, although none blinked at the pig on a spit roasting at the nearby Winter Feast'. The vertical suspension of the cow's carcass in Nitsch's event is also visually reminiscent of *Deadloch's* Beast on a Cross. As collective experiences, 'endurance' art, which involves prolonged communal engagement with the artist and/or artwork, can certainly be viewed as conducive to eliciting the liminal togetherness embodied in *communitas* (Turner 2012). While the two Dark Mofo examples operate as 'immersive and theatricalized' gothic tourist events (McEvoy 2016: 201), 'joy' may not necessarily be the collective emotion that is evoked, but rather a more complex mixture including fear, sorrow, or disgust. Nitsch's event, for example, was described as 'a visceral event at once pleasurable, horrifying, pornographic, spiritual and grotesque' (Frank 2017).

One of Dark Mofo's most famous events is a modern pagan ritual: the Nude Solstice Swim, when the 'city [comes] together once again, to strip down to nothing and plunge into the freezing Derwent River' (Harmon 2016). Edith Turner (2012) states that 'transgressions of ordinary behaviour [are] bursting with *communitas*'. As such, the transgressive act of publicly doffing your clothes to plunge into icy water with thousands of strangers may well be an experience of communal elation. *Deadloch's* Festival has its own public-nudity event, cheekily billed on its blackboard as 'Freeze Your Nips Off'. In a subversion of crime/noir narratives, the camera moves across several bodies lying still and naked on dark sand, initially tricking viewers into believing they are unfortunate victims of the serial killer.

Befitting its feminist theme, the event is revealed to be an all-female nude photoshoot on the chilly shores of Deadloch lake. When the women rise to take a break, the illusion is broken and the serious tone subverted, with one of them saying 'there's a rock up my bum'. Cath discovers local man Jimmy (Matt Burton) hiding in the bushes masturbating and furiously

screams at him, 'this is art!' Her disgusting discovery also disrupts the women's *communitas*, but Jimmy seemingly gets his comeuppance when his dead body is discovered on the beach by the mayor chained to a cross, in a crucifixion style. His grotesque display mimics the Festival dinner, with the 'beastly' Jimmy becoming a 'beast on a cross' himself. This is an excellent example of how *Deadloch* integrates its parodic festival events into the central crime narrative.



Nude Solstice Swim, Dark Mofo 2021 (photo by Dark Mofo/Rosie Hastie, used under Creative Commons License)

On a lighter note, a small but significant performance component of *Deadloch's* Festival can be found in its choir. As previously mentioned, another of Tasmania's enduring winter events is the Festival of Voices, billed as 'Australia's leading singing celebration' with 2025 marking its twentieth year of filling Hobart with song each winter.¹⁰ *Deadloch's* all-female vocal ensemble can be seen as a nod both to this event and to the series' overarching feminist themes. The act of singing in a choir can also be viewed as an experience of *communitas*, and the collective joy is evident when the choir is seen rehearsing and later performing at the Festival's opening night. Not missing a beat in subverting this joy with comedy, Dulcie is an uneasy participant in rehearsal, in stark contrast to her enthusiastic wife Cath and the other singers, and is undoubtedly thankful to be excused from the performance due to the murder investigation. Although the choir is not seen on screen again, their singing features as a soundtrack throughout the series, providing a sonic underpinning at key moments. For example, their rendition of *Release the Beast*¹¹ can be heard at the conclusion of the Beast on a Cross dinner scene, when detective Dulcie realises a killer may be seated among them. The song intensifies during a slow pan across the dinner table, where diners eat chunks of meat with their hands and lick their fingers, highlighting their murderous potential; any one of them may have an appetite for something beyond the barbecued beast.

¹⁰ <https://festivalofvoices.com/about-the-festival/>

¹¹ 'Release the Beast' [song], performed by Deadloch Choir. Originally by Breakwater, 1980, Arista Records.

Conclusion: Gothic bodies and festive excess as parody/homage

Spooner identifies that contemporary Gothic, more than its earlier iterations, is obsessed with bodies: 'bodies become spectacle, provoking disgust; modified, reconstructed and artificially augmented' (2007: 63). Reactions to the spectacle of various 'bodies'—human, beast, dead or alive—presented for culinary or artistic consumption at gothic-infused festivals such as Dark Mofo will differ according to personal perspective. Some, for example, may find the carcass of a barbequed wallaby disgusting, and controversial endurance art events such as Nitsch's bull dismemberment clearly provoke strong visceral reactions. The perennial Nude Solstice Swim faced a ban at its inception due to cries of public indecency, and there will doubtless be some who still find its beachful of 3000 naked bodies confronting and inappropriate.¹² In *Deadloch*, the unfortunate murder victims are bodies-as-spectacle, staged to provoke disgust (literally inducing vomiting) in those that discover them. However, bodies presented as part of the Feastival provide different spectacles, including the naked women at the photoshoot and the 'Beast' carved up for consumption. The gothic excesses of *Deadloch* are undercut with dark humour, with the grotesquery of its various bodies welcoming the disruptive laughter embodied in Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque (Spooner 2007: 66). It is important to note that, although the show mocks both high and low-brow arts events, MONA's founder, David Walsh, did not necessarily envisage his museum or events as highbrow affairs; rather, he wants the whole community to enjoy them. Franklin believes he 'steadfastly played the role of a clown in the making of Dark Mofo', with the festival itself mocking the art establishment while aiming to break down sociological barriers to consuming art (2019: 122).

Screen scholars Turnbull and McCutcheon (2024: 93) argue that *Deadloch* clearly 'sends up the narrative, aesthetics and familiar tropes of the [Nordic Noir] genre in ways which are also profoundly Australian', adding that a 'similar event [to Dark Mofo] is beautifully parodied' in the series (2024: 86). Taking into account Spooner's view that twenty-first-century gothic comedy has the power to 'provoke, critique and disturb' (2019: 197), in identifying *Deadloch* as a comic subversion of 'Tassie Goth-Noir' we can view the show as a critique and parody of both noir and gothic tropes. The series also highlights the symbiotic relationship between Tasmania's tourism and screen industries, with the show drawing on key campaign messages to 'embrace the darkness' of winter, both in a gothic, aesthetic sense and through literal indulgence in the comforting delights of its longer winter nights. Deadloch's 'Winter Feastival' provides an exciting narrative shell in which the crime story is contained, playfully poking fun at arts festivals and foodie culture. With the Feastival over and the crime solved, *Deadloch*'s finalepisode depicts a moment of 'spontaneous communitas' (Turner 1978) with disparate members of the community enjoying a football game together. In a lingering thread from the Feastival, the women's choir can be heard singing 'We Belong'.¹³

Brammer, Rebekah, 'Embracing the darkness: Tasmania's Winter Festivals as Parody and Homage in Amazon's Deadloch', *Journal of Festival Culture Inquiry and Analysis*, 4.1, (2025), 198-211

12 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-06-21/dark-mofo-hobart-midwinter-nude-swim-2024/103999600>

13 'We Belong [song], performed by Deadloch Choir. Originally by Pat Benatar, 1984, Chysalis Records.

Acknowledgements

The author's research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

References

Bastow, Clem, 'Dark Mofo 2016: An Opening Weekend of Endurance, Immersion and Dark Art', *The Guardian*, 14 June 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/jun/14/dark-mofo-2016-an-opening-weekend-of-endurance-immersion-and-dark-art>> [accessed 6 March 2025]

Bell, David, and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat*, (New York: Routledge, 1997)

Brammer, Rebekah, 'Dark Laughs: Australian Comedy Noir from the Outback to Tassie', *M/C Journal*, 28. 1, (2025), < <https://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/3152>>

Clarke, Robert, and Daniela Brozek, 'The Dark Turn: History and Performance at an Emerging Tasmanian Tourist Site', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 45.4, (2021), 507-23

Crane, Ralph, 'Where The Dark Gets In: Why Dark Mofo Lightens a Crowded Calendar', *The Conversation*, 3 June 2015, <<https://theconversation.com/where-the-dark-gets-in-why-dark-mofo-lightens-a-crowded-calendar-40080>> [accessed 6 March 2025]

Discover Tasmania, *The Off Season*, (2025), <<https://www.discovertasmania.com.au/off-season/>> [accessed 15 March 2025]

Evans, Matthew, 'An Ode to Offal', *SBS Food*, (2017), < <https://www.sbs.com.au/food/article/an-ode-to-offal/rxoor7iwr>> [accessed 1 April 2025]

Farrelly, Francis, and Marian Makkar, 'Augmenting the Food Experience through the Projection of Place: The Case of Tasmania', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 26.9, (2023), 1536-1553

Frank, Priscilla, 'Weird, People are Protesting an Art Performance Featuring 500 Liters of Bull Blood', *Huffington Post*, (2017), <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hermann-nitsch-bull-blood-protest_n_58f76718e4b0de5bac42841c> [accessed 3 April 2025]

Franklin, Adrian, 'Where "Art Meets Life": Assessing the Impact of Dark Mofo, A New Mid-Winter Festival in Australia', *Journal of Festive Studies*, 1.1, (2019), 106-27

Gunders, John, 'Professionalism, Place, and Authenticity In *The Cook and the Chef*', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 1.2, (2008), 119-26

Harmon, Steph, 'Dark Mofo: A Strangely Beautiful Town becomes Deliciously Deranged', *The Guardian*, (2016), <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/jun/24/dark-mofo-a-strangely-beautiful-town-becomes-deliciously-deranged>> [accessed 10 February 2025]

Kidd, Briony, 'How Tasmania became the Gothic Muse of Australian film and TV', *The Guardian*, (2016), <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/nov/24/how-tasmania-became-the-gothic-muse-of-australian-film-and-tv>> [accessed 22 April 2024]

McEvoy, Emma, *Gothic Tourism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

Ooi, Can Seng, 'Sensitive and Sensible Tourism Development' in *Tourism in Tasmania*, ed. by Can Seng Ooi and Anne Hardy, (Lindisfarne: Forty South Publishing, 2020), pp. 9-22

Ooi, Can Seng, and Anne Hardy, 'Tasmania: The State of the State' in *Tourism in Tasmania*, ed. by Can Seng Ooi and Anne Hardy, (Lindisfarne: Forty South Publishing, 2020), pp. 1-6

Piatti-Farnell, Lorna, *Consuming Gothic: Food and Horror in Film*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Rocca, Jane, 'What's on the Wildly Fantastic Menu at Winter Feast', *Harper's Bazar Australia*, (2024), <<https://harpersbazaar.com.au/winter-feast-hobart-2024/>> [accessed 11 April 2025]

Spooner, Catherine, *Contemporary Gothic*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2007)

———, 'Gothic Comedy' in *Twenty-First-Century Gothic*, ed. by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019)

Tarulevicz, Nicole, 'We've got a Moat, and we're not Afraid to use it: Culinary Tourism, Borders, and Tasmania', *Visions in Leisure and Business*, 24.1, (2021), 120-30

Tourism Tasmania, *Tasmanian Tourism Fast Facts*, (2024), <<https://www.tourismtasmania.com.au/siteassets/documents/fast-facts/2024-12---tourism-fast-facts---updated-dec-2024.pdf>> [accessed 10 March 2025]

Teague, Marcus, 'A Bloodbath, a Boycott, a Blindfolded Kidnapping: After 10 Chaotic Years, has Dark Mofo Lost its Edge?', *The Guardian*, 6 June 2023, <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2023/jun/06/dark-mofo-2023-10-years-bloodbath-boycott-kidnapping-hobart-festival>> [accessed 3 February 2025]

Turnbull, Sue, and Marion McCutcheon, *Transnational TV Crime: From Scandinavia to the Outback*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024)

Turner, Edith, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

Turner, Victor, 'In and Out of Time: Festivals, Liminality, and Communitas', *Festival of American Folklife Program*, (1978), <<https://festival.si.edu/articles/1978/in-and-out-of-time-festivals-liminality-and-communitas>> [accessed 14 April 2025]

Open Access © 2025 by Rebekah Brammer. A copy of this article may be downloaded for free from the Journal of Festival Culture Inquiry and Analysis under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)